

Oral History Interview

SSgt. Leon Hooper
U.S. Marine Corps
Aleutian Islands, Alaska

January 6, 2014
Halifax, PA

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Interview with Leon Hooper

Aleutian World War II National Historic Area Oral History Program

January 6, 2014, Halifax, Pennsylvania

Interviewed by Joshua Bell, Volunteer Oral Historian and Researcher,
National Park Service

Transcribed by Professional Transcripts

This interview is part of the Aleutian World War II National Historic Area Oral History Project. The interview with Leon Hooper was recorded with his permission on a digital recorder. Copies of the audio file are preserved in mp3, wav and wma formats and are on file at the offices of the National Park Service in Anchorage, Alaska.

The transcript has been lightly edited.

0:00:00.8 Introduction

Joshua Bell: Today is January 6, 2014. I am Joshua Bell, volunteer oral historian and researcher for the Aleutian World War II National Historic Area. Thank you for participating in our oral history project. For the record, could I have you say your name please?

Leon Hooper: Leon Hooper.

Joshua Bell: And when and where were you born?

Leon Hooper: Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

0:00:27.9 Mr. Hooper talks about his family

Joshua Bell: And who were your parents?

Leon Hooper: My parents?

Joshua Bell: Mm-hmm.

Leon Hooper: William and Esther Hooper.

Joshua Bell: And what did they do?

Leon Hooper: My father was a machinist and my mother was a factory worker.

Joshua Bell: Where did they work?

Leon Hooper: In Millersburg, Pennsylvania.

Joshua Bell: Did you have any siblings?

Leon Hooper: Yes. I have a sister and a brother.

Joshua Bell: Did your brother join the service with you?

Leon Hooper: My brother was in the Air Force.

Joshua Bell: He was in the Air Force. What was it like growing up in Pennsylvania?

0:01:11.0 He describes his childhood years growing up in Pennsylvania

Leon Hooper: Well, I lived in the country and the rural area and went to a country school, a one-room school for a while, before schools were consolidated.

Joshua Bell: Mm-hmm.

Leon Hooper: Then I went to a school that was from grade 1 to grade 9 and then up to high school from 9 to 12.

Joshua Bell: And what did you do for fun as a kid?

Leon Hooper: Well, I lived near the Susquehanna River so I did a lot of swimming and boating. In the wintertime I did sledding. We had country roads we could sled on and the usual things kids did at that time.

0:02:05.7 Mr. Hooper was in high school when World War II broke out

Joshua Bell: Mm-hmm. What stage in life were you in when World War II broke out?

Leon Hooper: I was in high school at the time.

Joshua Bell: You were in high school? What do you remember thinking?

Leon Hooper: Well, I didn't know. To tell you the truth, I didn't even know where Pearl Harbor was. I had to get a map out to find it.

Joshua Bell: (Chuckling). Okay, let's see, what -- what do you remember about life during World War II?

Leon Hooper: Well, I remember when most of the men were a little older than me left to go into the service. I remember rationing and food stamps. I remember the gasoline rationing. We lived on a small farm and we got special rationing for gasoline because we had a tractor and I remember a lot of the -- not being able to buy automobile cars. You couldn't buy sugar and things like that. You -- we weren't really limited as far as meat because we could raise our own meat, but I know there was rationing on meat.

Joshua Bell: Mm-hmm. Did seeing those -- seeing those older kids go off and join the service affect your decision to join the service?

0:03:49.2 He decided to join the service because most of his family was in the military

Leon Hooper: No, not really. Most of my family was in the military. My family has been in the military ever since the Civil War. I had a grandfather on the Southern side who was a First Sergeant in the 19th Virginia Infantry Company F and I had a grandfather on the other side that was a Private in the Union Army, the 172nd Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteers.

0:04:25.2 His dad joined the Army at age 15

Joshua Bell: Hmm. Was your dad also in the service?

Leon Hooper: Yes, my dad was in the service. He enlisted when he was 15 years old in Petersburg, Virginia.

Joshua Bell: Wow.

Leon Hooper: His parents died six months apart and he had no place to go and he went in to Petersburg to enlist and the Army at that time would take them at 16, but he told the recruiter he was 16 and the fella said no, he said, you're not. But he said, under the circumstances he said, if you have no place to go you are 16.

Joshua Bell: Hmm.

Leon Hooper: So he enlisted at the age of 15 and was in right at the end of World War I and his job for a while was escorting bodies that were returned to the East Coast.

Joshua Bell: Hmm. Which branch of the service did you say he was in?

Leon Hooper: He was in the Army.

Joshua Bell: In the Army.

Leon Hooper: Yes.

Joshua Bell: Was that....

Leon Hooper: Actually I can give you -- his outfit here was the US Army Coast Artillery, Battery A, 64th Coast Artillery.

Joshua Bell: Hmm. Where were they assigned to?

Leon Hooper: The East Coast.

Joshua Bell: The East Coast generally, okay.

Leon Hooper: Yeah, the East Coast in general. He was stationed down around Fort Monroe in Virginia and in the Norfolk area.

Joshua Bell: Did -- was service talked about in your family?

0:06:11.6 Mr. Hooper's extended family was in the service as well

Leon Hooper: Yes. Yeah, that was -- we had -- in fact most of my cousins were all in the Army. My cousin, my uncle, I had an uncle that was in during World War I, another uncle was in during -- the US Army during World War II. I had a cousin that was a medic. He was in the US Army. I had a cousin that was in -- a Sergeant. He was US Air Force at Dutch Harbor when Dutch Harbor was bombed.

Joshua Bell: So you knew about the Aleutians.

Leon Hooper: Oh, yeah! Yeah, the reason I knew about the Aleutians, he -- all of the mail was censored at that time but he wrote to his mother and he told her, he said, you remember how granddad used to dress in the wintertime when it was cold, when he'd put on two pair of long underwear? Well, he said, I need them now.

Joshua Bell: (Chuckling).

Leon Hooper: So she figured out he was in Alaska.

Joshua Bell: (Laughter). They always find a way around the censors.

Leon Hooper: That's right.

0:07:27.6 He decided to join the Marines in 1946

Joshua Bell: Mm-hmm. So -- so with all this family in the Army, why did you join the Marines?

Leon Hooper: Well, I originally had gone to Harrisburg to enlist in the Coast Guard.

Joshua Bell: (Laughter).

Leon Hooper: I couldn't find any place to go into the Coast Guard, so I wandered into the Marine Corps Enlistment Office and that's when I enlisted. I was -- had just turned 17.

Joshua Bell: Wow. Talk about night and day.

Leon Hooper: Yeah (laughter).

Joshua Bell: Did you happen to go with any friends?

Leon Hooper: No.

Joshua Bell: No.

Leon Hooper: No. There was -- there was no one around that I went with. The group I went with, most of them were from the Reading, Pennsylvania area.

Joshua Bell: Hmm. Now what -- what year was this?

Leon Hooper: 1946.

0:08:24.6 The reaction his family had to him joining the Marines

Joshua Bell: 1946. What did your family think about you joining?

Leon Hooper: Well, there wasn't too much said. I had to get a permission paper from the enlisting officer to take home to get my parents to sign and my dad knew I wanted to go, so he signed the paper and I went.

Joshua Bell: Mm-hmm. Off to Parris Island.

Leon Hooper: Off to Parris Island.

Joshua Bell: And how far away from home had you been before that?

Leon Hooper: The furthest I had been away from home before that, let's see was..... I don't think I'd ever been out of the state.

Joshua Bell: Oh, wow! So a change of scenery for sure.

Leon Hooper: Yes, it was.

Joshua Bell: What was the train ride like?

0:09:10.9 The train ride to Parris Island

Leon Hooper: The train ride wasn't too bad. We got on a train and I had to go by train from Harrisburg to Philadelphia and in Philadelphia we were examined again and we got on a troop train and went to Parris Island.

Joshua Bell: Hmm.

Leon Hooper: And I think -- I'm not exactly sure which stop we made in Parris Island, but it was close. I can't really recall the exact station it was. It was very close because I remember the first guy that -- that saw us when we got off was a Buck Sergeant. He was our drill instructor and I can remember the screaming started about that time.

Joshua Bell: (Laughter). What were you thinking at that point?

Leon Hooper: Did I make a mistake! (Laughter).

Joshua Bell: So what was -- oh, go ahead.

Leon Hooper: It was about the only thing I could think of. I don't think I was the only one. I think we all -- we all felt that way.

0:10:21.5 A typical day at Parris Island

Joshua Bell: (Laughter). What was a typical day like?

Leon Hooper: Well, we got up at 5 o'clock in the morning. We fell out for calisthenics at 5:30, 6 o'clock we went for breakfast until 6:30 and then the day started. Marching, rifle drill and just about anything you could think of.

Joshua Bell: Hmm.

Leon Hooper: It was mostly that they kept you busy until 5 o'clock in the evening.

Joshua Bell: Mmm.

Leon Hooper: And then that -- that wasn't always the time to stop, but most of the time the day ended for us around 5.

0:11:03.0 His memories about boot camp

Joshua Bell: Hmm. What -- what do you remember about boot camp?

Leon Hooper: Well, it was 16 weeks when I went and I remember my drill instructor. I met him. We had a reunion in Reading back a number of years ago and he was invited and he came and I remember both him and an assistant drill instructor we had and I remember, oh, the whole -- the days were mostly filled with marching and calisthenics and we had to -- we went to the rifle range to learn to shoot the M1 rifle.

Joshua Bell: Mm-hmm.

Leon Hooper: And other than that I -- most of the days were the same. They kept you busy.

Joshua Bell: Mm-hmm.

Leon Hooper: And you did -- you didn't march on parade fields. They took you out in these fields that were full of sand and that's where we spent our days, and hot. It was during August and September and October and it was really warm.

Joshua Bell: Hmm. Did you stay in touch with your family?

Leon Hooper: Yes. Yeah, I wrote to my family. I wasn't a big letter writer but I wrote to them enough to let them know I was still around.

Joshua Bell: (Laughter). Did they ever write back?

Leon Hooper: Yes. My parents wrote back. They didn't -- they weren't big letter writers either, but we kept in touch all the time I was in the service.

Joshua Bell: After boot camp, what was your specialty?

0:12:46.3 Specializing in motor transport after boot camp

Leon Hooper: I went into motor transport. They sent me to Quantico, Virginia, and I was in a motor transport battalion there and I wasn't really too crazy about it. I'd enlisted on a two-year enlistment and I wanted to go overseas.

Joshua Bell: Mm-hmm.

Leon Hooper: I went down to the -- the enlistment office on the base and I talked to a Lieutenant down there and he said, well you can't go overseas on a two-year enlistment. He said you'll have to re-enlist for four more years.

Joshua Bell: Hmm.

Leon Hooper: So -- and I said well, I said, that's fine. I said I'll enlist then for four more years. Then he said to me, where do you want to go? I said, well I don't really know. I said it doesn't matter to me, just someplace overseas. He says we have an opening on Adak. Well, I had no idea anymore than the man in the moon where Adak was.

Joshua Bell: (Laughter).

Leon Hooper: So I said sure. I said, just 17 years old, who cares.

Joshua Bell: Mm-hmm.

0:13:55.3 He had many stops on the way to serve on Adak

Leon Hooper: So -- so that's where I ended up, on Adak. I went -- they shipped me from Quantico, Virginia. I went to San Francisco. I was stationed at Treasure Island in the San Francisco Bay for just -- just a few weeks. Then they shipped me to Pier 91 in Seattle, Washington. I was there a couple of weeks and then they shipped me from there to Anchorage and from Anchorage they flew me out to Kodiak on a Navy plane and I -- there was a ship that resupplied the Aleutian Islands, the USS Scania (AKA-40) and I got on the Scania and I don't know how many days the trip was but we stopped in Dutch Harbor and we had a couple of days in Dutch Harbor and then we went along until Adak.

Joshua Bell: So even more traveling.

Leon Hooper: Oh yeah.

Joshua Bell: More traveling for the kid who hadn't left the state.

0:15:10.7 He served as a prison guard while on his way to Adak

Leon Hooper: Yeah. Yeah, I did a lot of traveling before I got there. They kind of held me up in between places. I was a prison guard for a couple of weeks down in San Francisco at the Navy prison and I was also a prison guard at Seattle, Washington for a few weeks.

Joshua Bell: What did you think about that assignment?

Leon Hooper: I didn't like it.

Joshua Bell: Didn't like it (chuckling).

Leon Hooper: No, I didn't care for that. I just didn't. I got -- I think I felt sorry for the guys they had in there.

Joshua Bell: Hmm.

Leon Hooper: It didn't matter what they had them for but I just didn't -- it wasn't my idea of a fun thing to do.

Joshua Bell: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. What was your -- what was your experience riding on the ship like?

0:15:55.5 Mr. Hooper details the voyages of the USS Scania (AKA-40)

Leon Hooper: I was never on a ship like that. It was an AKA-40. It was really a supply ship. It started out -- it was -- the keel was laid in 1945 and it was shipped over -- it went over to the South Pacific and it was at Pearl Harbor, Tarawa, Majuro, Kwajalein, and then it returned back to Pearl and then they put it on what they called Magic Carpet duties and it went to Canton Island, Espiritu Santo, Eniwetok, Wake and Tacloban, Philippine Island, and then they released it from this what they called Magic Carpet duty and sent it back to California, and then it spent a year carrying voyages from Guam to Manus, the Philippines, Okinawa, Japan, and China. Then it returned back to Seattle, Washington and then they assigned it to a delivery service up in the Aleutian Islands. The ship was sold for scrap in 1965 to Zidell Corporation for scrapping.

Joshua Bell: Hmm.

Leon Hooper: But the ship had a long, long history. It wasn't a big ship. It was 4087 tons. It was 426 feet long, 58 foot breadth and it drew 16 feet and had a top speed of 16.9 knots, and it was armed with eight 40 mm and ten 20 mm.

Joshua Bell: Wow.

Leon Hooper: And, yeah, I hate to say it.....

Joshua Bell: Mm-hmm.

Leon Hooper:because of my Navy -- Navy friends, but it was one of the crummiest ships I was ever on.

Joshua Bell: (Laughter).

Leon Hooper: It was absolutely filthy.

Joshua Bell: Hmm.

Leon Hooper: I don't know if it was -- I think the captain was a Lieutenant as far as I know.

Joshua Bell: Hmm.

Leon Hooper: I don't know if he didn't like the duty he had or what it was, but it was a -- kind of a scrubby looking -- scrubby looking ship as far as I was concerned.

Joshua Bell: (Laughter). Tell me about your plane ride.

0:18:34.6 His plane ride to Alaska

Leon Hooper: Well, the plane ride up to Alaska wasn't -- wasn't too bad. It was -- I had been on some small planes before, but never on anything that big and it was a Navy -- Navy plane, a four-engine, I think a C-54.

Joshua Bell: Mm-hmm.

Leon Hooper: And that -- that flight wasn't too bad and the same way with the one from Anchorage to Kodiak. I think it was on the same type plane.

Joshua Bell: Hmm. What were your impressions of Alaska?

0:19:09.3 Mr. Hooper's impressions of Alaska

Leon Hooper: I loved it. I -- I went back up and worked up there on the DEW line for three and a half years after I came home.

Joshua Bell: Hmm.

Leon Hooper: I worked up there for Federal Electric Corporation out of Paramus, New Jersey.

Joshua Bell: Mm-hmm.

Leon Hooper: And I enjoyed my time up there.

Joshua Bell: Mmm, and how about on the..... Oh, go ahead.

Leon Hooper: It was cold up where I was at. I was on a main -- our main station was the little island off the northern coast of Alaska called Barter Island.

Joshua Bell: Mm-hmm.

Leon Hooper: And then my job -- I was in charge of supply and I got to ride back and forth on a lot of small planes from Barter Island over to Point Barrow to all of the radar stations that were up in that area.

Joshua Bell: Mm-hmm.

Leon Hooper: So I did -- did a lot of flying up there at that time.

Joshua Bell: Mmm. What was your impression of Adak?

0:20:12.9 Mr. Hooper's impressions of Adak specifically

Leon Hooper: It wasn't too bad. It was -- they had scaled it down after the war and a lot of the guns had been removed by that time, by the time I got there, and just gun emplacements were still there but it was -- it wasn't really too bad. It's -- if you know anything about it now it's -- they call it Adak City now.

Joshua Bell: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Leon Hooper: And it's been completely rebuilt and there are beautiful homes and everything on it. Hospital.

Joshua Bell: Let me see here. Who were your commanding officers?

0:20:57.5 He speaks highly of the commanding officer he had on Adak

Leon Hooper: My commanding officer was Hugh J. Irish. He was a Major.

Joshua Bell: And what -- I forgot to ask, what unit were you with? What outfit?

Leon Hooper: Well, I -- the -- we were security units for security detachments for the Navy base on Adak and Hugh Irish was the commanding officer. He was a good officer; probably one of the best officers I had during my tour in the Marine Corps.

Joshua Bell: What -- what qualities do you think made him a good officer?

Leon Hooper: Well, he was -- he was fair for one thing and if you did something that was right, he'd tell you it was right. If you did something that was wrong, he'd tell you that was wrong too, but he would -- I would say he was completely fair as far as he went and everybody -- everybody seemed to get along with him.

Joshua Bell: Hmm.

Leon Hooper: He was just a little fella. I don't think he was more than about 5 feet 6.

Joshua Bell: Hmm.

Leon Hooper: But he was always -- always well dressed, just as sharp as could be, and he had two other officers with him, Lieutenant Eckland and, let's see, Lonnie Leslie. They were both Lieutenants -- First Lieutenants.

Joshua Bell: Hmm, and what was your rank?

0:22:39.9 He was ranked as a Corporal on Adak and left the Marine Corps as Staff Sergeant

Leon Hooper: I was a Corporal at the time.

Joshua Bell: Corporal.

Leon Hooper: And when I left the Marine Corps, I was a Staff Sergeant.

Joshua Bell: Very good. My grandfather was in the -- the Air Corps up in Alaska, up in the Aleutians, and he used to like to joke that he made Buck Sergeant three times.

Leon Hooper: Three times (laughter).

Joshua Bell: Yep.

0:23:05.0 Keeping in touch with other veterans at reunions for those who served in the Aleutian Islands

Leon Hooper: Yeah, well that happens. I was with -- we have a yearly reunion for Aleutian Island veterans. I haven't gone for the past two or three years, but I had gone for about seven or eight years in a row and it was for all -- all different services. We had Air Force, Army, Navy, Coast Guard. Whoever was in the Aleutians was eligible to come.

Joshua Bell: Mm-hmm.

Leon Hooper: I met a lot of -- met a lot of fellas there that had served during World War II.

Joshua Bell: Hmm.

0:23:40.1 He shares a story about a Japanese prisoner of war on Attu

Leon Hooper: I particularly remember one -- one fella that was on Attu and he was there when they invaded Attu and after the invasion was over he said he was in chow line one morning and there was this fella that got in front of him all wrapped up in a blanket and he said -- said something to the fella and the fella didn't answer. A couple of

times he tried to talk to him and this fella would just turn around and smile at him and wouldn't say anything.

Joshua Bell: Hmm.

Leon Hooper: So he motioned his First Sergeant off to the side and he said I think that's a Japanese, and that's what they found out it was. It was one of those that went into hiding instead of dying for the Emperor.

Joshua Bell: Oh, no sir.

Leon Hooper: And he came out and they took him as a prisoner of war and treated him I guess as such because they only captured a few of those fellas.

Joshua Bell: Mm-hmm.

Leon Hooper: He just -- he said that he couldn't speak any English at all, but he said he could smile.

Joshua Bell: (Laughter). You can't blame a guy for trying to get some chow.

Leon Hooper: Yeah, that's right. He said he was hungry. He said to his First Sergeant, he said, let's let him eat because he said he's got to be hungry. So that's what they did. One sat on each side of him and made sure he was -- didn't have any guns or anything.

Joshua Bell: Mm-hmm.

Leon Hooper: And he said he ate. He was well -- he said he was well behaved.

Joshua Bell: Hmm.

Leon Hooper: He said he was one of the -- one of the few that didn't die for the Emperor.

Joshua Bell: Hmm.

Leon Hooper: They only -- only had a few prisoners.

Joshua Bell: Mm-hmm. Now this is -- this was at an Aleutian veteran get together -- reunion.

Leon Hooper: Yes. Yes.

Joshua Bell: Do you know if they are having one this coming year?

Leon Hooper: As far as I know.

Joshua Bell: Okay. I don't know if my supervisor knows about that. Would it be okay if you -- would you mind contacting me once you get that information?

Leon Hooper: When I get that information, you give me your telephone number; I will give you a call.

Joshua Bell: Excellent! Thank you!

Leon Hooper: There's a -- there's a fella by the name of Albert King who lives down in Florida. He's been in charge of it for years already and I don't have his current address.

Joshua Bell: Okay.

Leon Hooper: But I -- yeah, I get a paper every three or four months called the Williwaw.....

Joshua Bell: Mm-hmm.

Leon Hooper:and that has his name and address on it and I can give you a call and make sure you get it.

Joshua Bell: Excellent. Thank you. Let me see here..... What would -- what was a typical day like for you at work on.....

Leon Hooper: When I was up in the Aleutians?

Joshua Bell: Yeah, up in the Aleutians.

0:26:39.5 A typical work day in the Aleutians

Leon Hooper: Well, get up in the morning..... I was in the supply department, so I had a fairly routine thing. I worked in the office and I also was in charge of the warehouse we had and get up in the morning, go for breakfast, go report over to the office and I -- I worked for a tech sergeant by the name of Brendan McVeigh. He'd tell me what I was supposed to do for the day and I'd either work in the office or I'd -- I'd work down in the warehouse and that was usually the -- I was the only one in the warehouse so I could pretty well do what I wanted to most days.

Joshua Bell: (Laughter).

Leon Hooper: No one bothered me.

0:27:28.2 Recreational activities in the Aleutians

Joshua Bell: Mm-hmm. What did you and your buddies do for recreation?

Leon Hooper: Well, I was never much of a drinker. One or two beers was about my limit.

Joshua Bell: Mm-hmm.

Leon Hooper: But a lot of the fellas did a lot of drinking and how they could drink that stuff I don't know because it was about the cheapest beer you could find. I remember one -- one kind, it was called Red Fox and it came out of Seattle, Washington. I figured anybody that could drink that stuff, more than two cans of that, really had a good constitution because it -- it was terrible stuff.

Joshua Bell: (Laughter).

Leon Hooper: As far as recreation, we had -- we'd go on hikes. There were a lot of places we'd go hiking. There was good fishing, good salmon fishing, and there was trout fishing in some of the streams. We always managed to keep busy. We had a recreation hall where you could play pool or play cards and read. There was a library, so we -- we pretty well took care of ourselves. Then there was a -- we didn't have PX on our side of the base but we could go over to the Army side of the base and they had a PX over there, but the Navy side had none.

0:28:50.5 Morale was not bad while he was in the Aleutians

Joshua Bell: Hmm. How was morale?

Leon Hooper: It wasn't too bad. I -- I never heard anybody complain too much. We all knew we were there for 18 months and kind of put up with just the way it was. I mean, it was -- I'd say -- I'd say morale was pretty good. When I first went up there I was -- they put me on guard duty, and I -- they put me on guard duty and there was an ammunition depot way back in the mountains and they had a Marine guard post back there, and you'd get back there for four hours. You were back there by yourself on a four-hour shift. I never cared too much for that.

Joshua Bell: Hmm. Mm-hmm.

0:29:41.3 He describes a night when he was on guard duty and had his weapon apart for cleaning when the Sergeant came for weapon check

Leon Hooper: I was -- I was back there one night. They gave you a .45 and every -- every half hour or every hour you had to walk so far and check the locks on certain buildings and I'd do this, but I got bored one night and I got my .45 out and I took the thing apart and had it all laying out on the bench. We had a little heated building we were in. Had this thing all laying out on the bench and I see the Sergeant and the guard's Jeep coming.

Joshua Bell: (Laughter).

Leon Hooper: Usually he wanted to check your weapon.

Joshua Bell: Mm-hmm.

Leon Hooper: So he stopped and I had put just the frame of the .45 in my holster because I didn't have time to get it back together (laughter) and luckily that night he didn't ask to see my weapon.

Joshua Bell: (Laughter).

Leon Hooper: I'd probably still be out there in the boonies if he'd caught me.

Joshua Bell: (Laughter). How was the -- I have to ask -- how was the weather?

Leon Hooper: The what?

Joshua Bell: The weather?

0:30:52.3 The weather in the Aleutians

Leon Hooper: The weather? It -- lousy!

Joshua Bell: (Laughter).

Leon Hooper: That's about the only way you could put it. You got very few sunshiny days. Once in a while you'd get -- we'd get a nice one and during what they called summer up there you'd maybe get a couple days that it would get nice and warm but most of the time the temperature was in the 50s and 60s, wind blowing. When it blew, it blew like crazy. They had these storms they called williwaws.....

Joshua Bell: Mm-hmm.

Leon Hooper:and they were just like miniature hurricanes. They'd blow for a few days, then they'd quit and you'd get a couple of nice days and then it would be back to blowing again. Most of the time it was rainy and wet and foggy. Fog was one of the worst things.

Joshua Bell: Hmm. Were there ever any incidents with aircraft or ships?

0:31:50.5 Wind caused planes to crash on landing occasionally

Leon Hooper: Yeah, we had a -- we had a bunch of P-61s there and we also had some P-40 fighters. Occasionally one would come in wind blowing and miss the runway and end up in a pile of scrap, but I don't ever remember of anybody dying in any of the accidents that I know of.

Joshua Bell: Good.

0:32:17.7 Mr. Hooper recalls men stealing food from the Navy commissary

Leon Hooper: As far as food went, the food I couldn't complain at all. The food was -- food was good. We were well -- well treated as far as food went. Occasionally we had

to take some from the Navy that we weren't supposed to have but we found ways to get it.

Joshua Bell: (Laughter). How'd you manage that?

Leon Hooper: Well, the Navy had a big commissary and what they'd do is they'd take a truck down and there were only two or three Navy fellas that worked in the commissary, so they'd take one of these Dodge trucks down, these 6 x 6s, and pack the thing up. Two of the fellas would keep them occupied (laughter) getting the order placed and two of the fellas would steal stuff.....

Joshua Bell: (Laughter).

Leon Hooper:especially stuff that we never got like canned fruit and stuff like that.

Joshua Bell: (Laughter).

Leon Hooper: So, there was always ways to get -- I was never in on any of that, but I knew it went on.

Joshua Bell: (Laughter). What other kind of hijinks did you guys get up to?

0:33:31.6 The men would have 4th of July parades around the base on Adak

Leon Hooper: Well, we pretty well behaved ourselves because we were watched pretty well. We had a parade once a year that -- around the 4th of July. We'd parade around the base and the Navy fellas they'd get together and parade around with us. I can remember they had a unit there and they had a Navy chaplain and he was -- he was a good chaplain but he was -- he wasn't much of a military man and I can remember he had this group of sailors ahead of us and I don't think he knew the military commands because when he got to the one corner he hollered out around the corner men!

Joshua Bell: (Laughter). Did you -- did you feel in touch with your family?

0:34:37.9 Mr. Hooper kept in contact with his family while in the Aleutians

Leon Hooper: Yeah, I stayed in touch with them. Like I said, I wasn't a big letter writer, but I wrote to them and I had an aunt and an uncle that I used to write to that I had lived with for a short time when I was a young boy, but other than that I didn't do any writing. I didn't have a girlfriend, so I didn't write. I had a girlfriend before I left. Now I'm married to her and she often wanted to know why I didn't write to her, but I -- I just didn't write.

Joshua Bell: (Laughter).

Leon Hooper: So we've been married 64 years now.

Joshua Bell: Oh, congratulations!

Leon Hooper: Thank you.

Joshua Bell: Do you think your -- did you have a conversation with your uncle who had been in the Aleutians, or your cousin who had been in the Aleutians?

Leon Hooper: No. No. I had -- he had written to me a few times when he was up in the Aleutians but he had left before I got up there. He was -- he was -- I remember him telling me later on after the war that he was at Pearl Harbor when it was bomb -- not Pearl Harbor. He was at Dutch Harbor when it was bombed.

Joshua Bell: Hmm, and you didn't have any conversations with him before you -- before you went up?

Leon Hooper: No, I didn't. Not before I went up.

Joshua Bell: So no one to tell you what -- what to expect.

Leon Hooper: No. I didn't know. I -- when I got off the boat then I knew what to expect (laughter). It didn't look like much.

Joshua Bell: (Laughter). What from your experience has really stuck with you?

0:36:24.4 He chose to be discharged in 1949 rather than moving his family around from base to base

Leon Hooper: Oh, I don't know. I liked the Marine Corps. I -- I was kind of inclined to stay in but I was married at the time and had children and it just -- it just didn't appeal to me after I thought things over to drag the family around from base to base like they were always moving you. I was -- had a good commanding officer and when I got ready to be discharged he told me -- he said if you will re-enlist for four more years, he said, I'll see that you get another stripe, which would have made me a Tech Sergeant, probably one of the youngest ones at the time in the Marine Corps, but I decided no I was going to go home.

Joshua Bell: Mm-hmm, and when was this?

0:37:21.0 He was called back to serve in the war in Korea and served until 1952

Leon Hooper: That was 1949. Then I got called -- I got called back in when the war started in Korea and I was in until 1952.

Joshua Bell: What did you do? What did you do at that -- at that time?

Leon Hooper: Well, I was sent down to Camp Lejeune and I was a Supply Sergeant in a 105 Artillery outfit and they got sent overseas. The day they got sent overseas I was in the hospital with scarlet fever and I didn't go and I thought when I came back they'd send me after the outfit, but they didn't.

Joshua Bell: Hmm.

Leon Hooper: I stayed there. I was a Staff Sergeant at the time and I stayed there. I didn't really know what to do because I went back and there was no one in the whole area and I found a Second Lieutenant and asked him, I said, what am I supposed to do up there? He said you stay there and you're in charge until we get a new outfit formed or an officer comes in and it was a couple of weeks. We started getting a few men at a time and finally there was a Second Lieutenant that came in and then I dumped everything on his lap.

Joshua Bell: (Laughter).

Leon Hooper: I was never so glad to see anybody in my life as I was to see him.

Joshua Bell: (Laughter). And you were married at this time?

Leon Hooper: Yes, I was.

Joshua Bell: You were. Did the family come with you?

Leon Hooper: No. No. No, they stayed at home.

Joshua Bell: And where was home?

Leon Hooper: Miller -- Helvetia, Pennsylvania.

Joshua Bell: What did your wife think about you going?

0:39:05.0 His wife was not pleased that he was called back into service

Leon Hooper: Well, she wasn't too happy about it. I was at work and she met me coming home from work and I knew it didn't look good. She had an envelope in her hand. She said you got called back in the Marine Corps. I had been in the Reserves.....

Joshua Bell: Mm-hmm.

Leon Hooper:and there wasn't much you could do about it. I had two weeks until I could leave so kind of went through two weeks and went down to Camp Lejeune.

Joshua Bell: Hmm. Were you ever worried about being sent overseas?

Leon Hooper: No, I never worried too much. I thought kind of if I got sent, okay, and if I didn't I wasn't going to ask for it (laughter) because I knew what some of those fellas were going through over there, but -- and my outfit that I was in had a high casualty rate so I..... They were up at Chosin Reservoir when they got surrounded by the Chinese up there.

Joshua Bell: Mm-hmm.

Leon Hooper: So I'm glad I didn't get to go.

Joshua Bell: Mm-hmm. Me too. Well, let's see..... Was that your last stint?

Leon Hooper: That was it.

Joshua Bell: That was it.

Leon Hooper: Well, they sent me -- sent me back from Camp -- Camp Lejeune and then I went back to Quantico, Virginia and I worked in the supply office there for a couple of weeks before I got discharged and I was discharged from Quantico.

Joshua Bell: Your wife must have been very happy about that.

Leon Hooper: Yes, she was. Yes.

Joshua Bell: You must have been kind of happy about it too.

Leon Hooper: (Chuckling). Yeah, I was glad to get out. I -- I liked the Marine Corps and I -- looking back I -- sometimes I wish I'd have stayed in but you have a lot of hindsight but not much foresight.

Joshua Bell: (Laughter). Mm-hmm.

Leon Hooper: But as far as the Marine Corps went I -- I'm glad I put the time in.

Joshua Bell: Mm-hmm.

0:41:23.5 He feels that young people today should spend some time in the military

Leon Hooper: I think it would do a lot of these young people today a lot of good if they spent a couple of years in the military.

Joshua Bell: Mmm.

Leon Hooper: Maybe they'd learn something.

Joshua Bell: (Laughter). How so?

Leon Hooper: Well, I think -- I think it's too easy for them. I think it's -- there's just no -- it just seems like there's no discipline really in the schools anymore and kids seem to expect more than what I think they should have at that age.

0:42:05.7 Closing remarks

Joshua Bell: Mmm. Mm-hmm. Is there anything that you wanted to mention in the interview that I -- that I forgot to cover?

Leon Hooper: No, not that I know of.

Joshua Bell: Not that you know of, okay.

Leon Hooper: I probably told you more than I've said to anyone since I've been in the service.

Joshua Bell: Well, hey, I'm happy to -- happy to be that person.

Leon Hooper: And if you want to give me your telephone number then I can call you and I'll make sure that you find out where this reunion is being held.

Joshua Bell: Sure, I'd be happy to.

Leon Hooper: I'll make sure I get a hold of Al King and the reunion.....

End of interview at 0:42:44.7